Disability Visibility Podcast

Episode 33: Disabled Musicians

Guest: Gaelynn Lea

Host: Alice Wong

Transcript by Cheryl Green

For more information: disabilityvisibilityproject.com/podcast

Introduction

[hip-hop]

LATEEF MCLEOD: This is the Disability Visibility Podcast with your host, Alice Wong.

ALICE WONG: Hey, hey! Welcome to the Disability Visibility Podcast, conversations on disability politics, culture, and media. I'm your host Alice Wong. Today's episode features an interview with activist, musician, performer, and songwriter Gaelynn Lea. Gaelynn won NPR's Tiny Desk Contest in 2016, which catapulted her into the public eye. We talked at my home in San Francisco this past February when she was here on tour. Gaelynn will talk about her activism, what it's like on the road, accessibility in music venues as a disabled performer, and her new album *Learning How to Stay,* which comes out September 7th, 2018. Are you ready? Away we go!

[electronic beeping, computerized voice counting down to 5, 4, 3, 2, 1]

ALICE: Gaelynn, thank you so much for being on my podcast today.

GAELYNN LEA: Thank you for having me!

ALICE: Yeah, I'm delighted to have you hear. Why don't you first, I guess, just tell me a little bit about yourself and anything you wanna share about your background.

GAELYNN: Yeah. Well, I was born and raised in Duluth. I have three siblings and two really cool parents. And I have a disability; I use an electric wheelchair. I have brittle bones disease, but my family had always been really encouraging. So at the age of 10, I decided I wanted to try playing the violin. And I didn't really think much of it 'cause you adapt everything all the time, but lucky for me, I had a teacher that was willing to kinda work with me and help me figure out a new way to play. So because of my small body size, I play violin up and down like a cello. And it didn't really dawn on me that that was a big deal until much later when I realized she could've just been like, "No, you should just do choir. This isn't gonna work." So I've been playing violin for 24 years. Went to college for Political Science and then did a lot of odd jobs until I realized I really wanted to do music for a living. So I started teaching fiddle and did that for three years before I entered the Tiny Desk contest. And it was kind of a big turning point.

NPR's Tiny Desk Concert and the 2018 tour

ALICE: Yeah, I think in 2016, I saw the announcement on NPR for the Tiny Desk concert, and I think that's how I first heard of you. And I think that's really how you became in the public eye. Would you agree with that?

GAELYNN: Oh yes, definitely. You know, I performed for about 10 years before I entered the Tiny Desk contest, but it was all local or regional. And I had just starting talking to my husband. So you know, I had just recorded my first album in 2015, and we were just starting to talk about well, maybe he could take a couple weeks off work, and we could do a small regional tour. But it was never like, I never imagined being in San Francisco today, talking to you. That kinda stuff wasn't even on my radar. But when we won the Tiny Desk, they were so funny. They were like, "You know, it's gonna change. Just so you know. Prepare yourself, and people are gonna contact you from all over. And just be ready for that." And you can't really be ready, but it was nice to have the heads up. And yeah, as soon as I won, it's like the network expanded exponentially. And I'm really grateful for that. I never saw that turn coming, you know?

ALICE: How's it changed your career?

GAELYNN: Oh my gosh.

ALICE: 'Cause you're here in the Bay Area. You're on tour.

GAELYNN: Yep.

ALICE: And I'm guessing that thanks to the Tiny Desk concert that really just got you opportunities that you never would have.

GAELYNN: Oh yeah. For sure. So when we won the Tiny Desk, the prize was doing four shows all over the country and recording in Tiny Desk. So and that was my first time playing out of the state, essentially. And then right after that, I started getting these emails about, "Will you come out to Washington? Will you come out to" this or this place? And I started thinking you know, if we were gonna try to tour, this would be the time to do it. You're never gonna have this kind of opportunity again. So my husband and I did a lot of talking and planning and decided to go all in. 'Cause I need him to travel with me just for support. And so yeah. He was willing to take a leave of absence from his job. So his work was really cool about it.

ALICE: And your husband's name is Paul?

GAELYNN: Yeah, Paul. And he was a custodian at a university for 10 years. And he had an evening job, and I taught in the evening. And we had this like happy little routine, and we decided to just say well, we can always go back to that if this doesn't work. But if we never try it, what kinda regrets would we have later on?

ALICE: Shout out to Paul!

GAELYNN: Yeah, Paul is awesome, seriously!

ALICE: Yeah.

GAELYNN: On a lotta levels. Even if I didn't have a disability, I wouldn't wanna travel that much without him, and I think about that a lot. I just feel really lucky that we're able to do what we do together.

ALICE: Yeah, what an adventure.

GAELYNN: Yeah, it is. It is.

ALICE: And have you been mainly the organizer of your tour, or do you have a booking agent?

GAELYNN: Right now, I have a booking agent. In May, I am actually gonna try for a little while to book myself because I feel like most artists start that way. And I didn't do that because we had to go all in. But now that I've met so many people all over the country and so many venues, I wanna try my hand at it. Because it's fun making those connections. Who knows how long I'll book myself, but I do want the challenge of trying it.

Difficulty finding accessible venues and changing standards

ALICE: Yeah, and also, I was wondering with you working with your booking agent, what kind of considerations did your agent and you have to make in terms of finding venues that were accessible?

GAELYNN: Ugh, yeah.

ALICE: Has that been a challenge?

GAELYNN: Oh my gosh. Well, it's a learning curve.

ALICE: Talk a little bit about that.

GAELYNN: Yeah. It's a learning curve for both of us. So basically, a lot of venues are accessible to the customer but not to the artist, right? But not even every venue is accessible to the customer. So there were a few times where I would play a show, and I'd realize— 'Cause you know, you've never been there before. You're driving four hours. You basically pull up to the venue, and your show is two hours later. A couple times, I would pull up and be like, oh my god. There are stairs. OK. So I can get in 'cause I'm small, and Paul can carry me. But it really felt terrible to be like, if someone shows up in a wheelchair, they're not gonna be able to come to my show.

And so I started making a hard rule of I won't play at a venue if people can't get in, which is so obvious, right? But not as easy as it sounds. So made that rule. One day I found out, for example, the place we were supposed to play two days later had 12 steps, and I don't know how that got missed. That's another reason I kinda wanna do my own stuff. So somehow, that got missed, and so I called the venue. I was like, "I'm really sorry, but this isn't gonna work." Like, let's quick find another place. So I suggested churches. And churches have been pretty open, and most of them are accessible to hosting an evening show. And so he found a church, and it went well. So there are creative ways around it, but it just takes a lot of planning.

And then accessibility of the stage is still a pretty big issues. It's on my stage plot, which is like a little form you send to them ahead of time, in bright red letters, in bold, on the top of the page: "I need a ramp. I use a wheelchair." But it still gets not listened to.

ALICE: That's a really funny thing about disability is like, you can be as explicit. For some reason they're like, a lot of people who don't have disabilities have a very different understanding of accessibility. Have you found that to be the case?

GAELYNN: That's a good question. Yes, it just made me think about that. So the thing that I ran into the most that took me a while to process— 'Cause again, I'm a pretty flexible person. Sometimes I'm like, "No way. This isn't just for me. This is for everyone who comes after me, right, or any little kid that comes to the show who has a disability that wants to perform someday." And so a lot of times, venues would do this thing where they would say, "Oh, we didn't get a ramp, but we're happy to lift your chair up." And it took me a while to process and figure out why that bothered me. And I realized that what it is, is you're still being treated like a

second-class citizen if they have to remove you from your wheelchair and put you up. And that works for me, but it wouldn't work for everyone, you know? If you're a bigger person, or if you have more equipment and it would be harder to do, it's not gonna work for that person. And so I don't want to be the exception to the rule like, oh, you put me on the stage this way, but then everyone else is still stuck.

And so in those cases, a lot of times I say, "You know what? I would prefer to just have you set me up on the floor, which looks worse for them. But then maybe they'll think about it next time." I don't wanna be lifted on the stage with my wheelchair because that's not equal access. And it really does change the vibe. I think about you wouldn't see someone like, I don't know, Neil Diamond isn't getting carried on the stage. That's ridiculous. You know what I mean? That just doesn't happen. And so why I should have to be cool with that, it really changes the energy of the show.

ALICE: Yeah, and it's a matter of respect as well.

GAELYNN: It is. Yep, it is. And it took me a while to, you know, I think it's hard for me to always process 'cause I don't wanna feel like, oh, I'm demanding this thing that's hard for them. But then I realize it's like, no. This is something else I found out: if people rent ramps, sometimes they are getting gouged. There are some actual logistical issues with accessibility that I think we need to be open to talking about. But that doesn't mean you have to give in and be like, you'll carry my chair up the stairs. What I think that means is then we'll say, "Well, let's take down your stage and put all the shows on the floor. If you really can't afford a ramp, disassemble the stage and play on the floor." There are creative ways around it that maybe are more cost-effective or space-effective or whatever. I think most venues, the tiny ones that say they can't afford a ramp, could also just not have a stage. 'Cause they're small enough where they could just have people play on the floor.

ALICE: Reconfigure the space.

GAELYNN: And reconfigure the space.

ALICE: And that's what accessibility's all about.

GAELYNN: Exactly. It's not about one size fits all.

ALICE: Yeah.

GAELYNN: It's like what can we do with what our situation to make it accessible? And sometimes it's a little bit counterintuitive, like oh well, just don't have a stage. And that's not an answer that people always wanna hear, but it's like the most realistic answer sometimes.

ALICE: And I think that's where it feels like—whether it's in entertainment or art or any industry—people have fixed ideas of what has to be the standard.

GAELYNN: Yep, exactly.

ALICE: And I think as disabled people, you and I know we're constantly kinda adapting and innovating.

GAELYNN: And finding a creative way to do what we have to do.

ALICE: And changing the standards.

GAELYNN: Yep, changing the standards all the time.

ALICE: That's what it means to be accessible, where I really think it's like accessibility, a lot of people think about it as a law, as a technical thing.

GAELYNN: Oh yeah.

ALICE: But I really think about it as attitudes because sometimes it's just about having an honest dialogue and being open to change. I think that's where we see a lot of resistance because people just presume that in order for a musician to have a concert, you have to be onstage.

GAELYNN: Mmhmm.

ALICE: And I think people have to let go of these kind of norms.

GAELYNN: Yep, they do. And I mean we do it all the time without even thinking about it at this point. And so I agree with you 100%, and I think letting go of the norms and just being more open to literally making it work.

So I guess when I talk about the ADA to people at my speeches, I say, "The ADA is not the lowest bar that allows you to fire someone. The ADA was created by radical activists who had disabilities who were understanding that they needed something better, right? And so the ADA is about what can we possibly do in our power to make it more accessible? It's not about doing the lowest amount of work and then saying you did it. It's about working around the system to try to find a way to include everybody or make access the reality."

ALICE: And it's really a philosophy.

GAELYNN: Yep, it is.

ALICE: And it's also going beyond the ADA.

GAELYNN: Well, there's no law saying you can go above and beyond, right?

ALICE: It's not just like there's this law, and it's great. But there's a lot of limitations as well.

GAELYNN: Yep.

ALICE: And the idea is how do we push all of us to think beyond that?

[*I Wait* by Gaelynn Lea, polyrhythmic art rock]

♪ And so I wait
Did you know that
When I get angry
I breathe fire
I could burn this place down?
You may not realize
All of the small ways
I am not welcome
But just take a look around

Still everybody knows
That you need a place to go
And livin' isn't easy
If you incinerate your home
And so I stay…. ♪

Gaelynn as disabled woman, musician, activist, writer, and speaker

ALICE: So let's talk about politics 'cause you've been also a public speaker. You write a blog post. You have other things; you do interviews. Tell me about, I guess, your identities as a musician, as a disabled woman, and activism. How do they all kinda intersect?

GAELYNN: They are all important. You know, when I started playing music, I think that I really just did it 'cause I love music, and I love the feeling that I got performing. And it was literally just about that. But one day, I was actually really angry about the way I was getting treated trying to get healthcare after we got married. So I'm on Minnesota Medical Assistance for Employed People with disabilities, so I can work. In Minnesota, which is cool, there's no limit to how much you can earn. You just have to pay more.

ALICE: No way!

GAELYNN: Yes, basically the best state in the world.

ALICE: See in California, I'm on the Working Disabled program. I can only earn 2 ½ times the federal poverty level.

GAELYNN: Ugh! Honestly, I don't know. We got it good right now. I mean at least, you know, I didn't know about the program. So they don't do a great job telling you. So I assumed that Paul and I would never be able to get married, and that was just the way it was gonna be. And then luckily, I was working at a Center for Independent Living at the time, and when we got engaged, like the day we got engaged literally, I called the healthcare office. And I was like, "OK, what do I gotta do to get on this program?" And they're like, "Well, you can't do anything until you get married because we can't do anything pre-emptively." I'm like, "OK, fine." So I waited, and then after we got married, I did all this paperwork.

But here's what happened: so I did all this paperwork, and then I got a rejection letter. And I was like, what the heck? I read the rules inside and out. Definitely, this is wrong. And the lady was like, "Oh no, you don't qualify for any healthcare. Right now, you'd have to earn basically less than the poverty limit." And I was like, "That can't possibly be true because of all this stuff I read and all the research and all the conversations I've had." And she's like, "Well, it is." And so then I lost my cool, and I don't do that very often. But I'm like swearing and yelling. I think it's like at a certain point, when you really feel like you did all the things right, and then you still get rejected for something that is terrible: I don't know how to explain. Something in me snapped. But because I snapped, she rereads the rules, and she's, "Oh wait! I read it wrong! You do qualify," for the one that I was applying for all along, right?

ALICE: So this one person who works in the government—

GAELYNN: Yes, just could've destroyed my actual life.

ALICE: —who's in charge of that program did not read the rules or understand the rules.

GAELYNN: Yep. I mean she was not in charge of the program, but she's one of the administrators.

ALICE: But still.

GAELYNN: She should've been like, "I don't know. Let me go ask someone." Holy cow. So anyway, so I was so mad, and I called, of course, the supervisor. I mean I definitely took that to another level afterwards just because I was like, what if I had been a person who didn't swear at you? What am I supposed to do? And she said, "I would recommend you get a divorce." We had literally just gotten married.

ALICE: Holy shit.

GAELYNN: I couldn't even believe it. So it was terrible. So anyway, I was complaining about this. I was talking to my friend, and I was like, "I'm so freakin' fed up with all of this." And she's like, "You need to speak about it somewhere." So that's where I made this survey that I talked to you about earlier. I have a survey called the Comprehensive Survey for People with Disabilities. 'Cause I didn't want it to just be me. If I was gonna go speak to people, I wanted to have some understanding if the issues I thought were important were also important to other people. You know what I mean?

So I did the survey. It took a long time. I prepared for it for a long time. I did a three-hour presentation to people who were in the Human Services industry. And what blew me away is how many people said, "Oh, I never thought of this before," or they just did not connect the dots. And I asked if anyone had heard of disability pride at one point, and two people raised their hand only. And I was like, oh my gosh. These people work with people with disabilities all the time, and they don't even know what disability pride is! This is a problem. So then I started advertising on my website. It's amazing what a website can do. I just said like, "I do public speaking about disability awareness," and I started getting more chances to speak.

I mean I have always identified, obviously, as disabled, and I don't have shame in it. And I definitely talk about it. I didn't realize how necessary talking about it until that day when I was like, oh my lord. If I don't talk about it, where are they gonna find out?

ALICE: You know, I think a lot of people have these ideas oh, to be an activist, you have to be x, y, and z.

GAELYNN: Or like a certain level of expert, which I think I felt like I needed to be.

ALICE: Everybody has the potential to speak about themselves or to advocate for their community.

GAELYNN: Mmhmm. It's true. I mean that ended up being, you know, at first I felt kinda like maybe not a fraud, but kinda like, what am I doing here? So that's why I did the survey, which I'm glad I did. Because then, that kinda reconfirmed. I do feel like we have to be mindful of the things we advocate for. I really think it's important to be like, "What can I do that would help other people too, not just me?" So when I do shows and stuff, I wanna make sure that it affects people down the line. Otherwise, it's not really advocacy.

ALICE: Yeah, and also, I think this idea of leaving something behind. Sometimes these things are fixed, individual situations. But only until we change the structure that the policies, that's when you really make change. That's the end goal, I think.

GAELYNN: Yep. And that's kinda one of the things I talked about. I ended my very first discussion like, "I bring up these things 'cause most of them are completely changeable." They're an abstract number on a chart that says you can only earn. That really affects you, right? If I don't have an income limit— I do have an asset limit, but it's actually pretty high. It doesn't count for retirement. Minnesota has a really good program.

ALICE: Wow!

GAELYNN: But that's a number on a page, and that can be changed. This is why it's important to talk about it because the more that realizing that this is not a fixed thing; we can do something about this. Then hopefully, you can have more states, for example, with a program like that where it really does allow. You know, I still don't get Social Security. And so if I couldn't work, it would be an issue for sure because I am only allowed my healthcare 'cause I work. Work can be pretty broadly defined. I mean $80/month is all you need to earn. But there are still a population in Minnesota that really wouldn't be able to get married, and that is still discriminatory. And that really bothers me. But I think that we can have these creative discussions of what are some ways where we can learn from other states, and how can we tell our legislators to change that number?

ALICE: And how do we get more disabled people in office?

GAELYNN: Mmhmm!

The love of performance and connecting to disability community through music

ALICE: So let's talk about your love of performance. What is it like for you when you're performing live in front of a crowd? What does it feel like, and what's the vibe?

GAELYNN: That's a good question. So for me—and I think everybody's probably different—but for me, performing is when I feel the most alert but also the most— Playing violin is a pretty tricky instrument, and you can mess it up pretty easily. So you really have to be in the present moment. You can't be thinking about, if you think about anything, basically, then you have the potential to mess it up, right? So you have to be really in the present moment that way. But then what's neat about performing, which is different than just playing, is there really is a palpable energy from the audience. And so not only do I feel like the most present, but I also feel the most energetic.

Sometimes I feel like performing almost sends energy from the top of your head down, out of your body. It's a very, kind of a spiritual thing. I really, really love it.

ALICE: I'm sure it is, yeah.

GAELYNN: Yeah. And it's really engaging. I really love— Like I brought my guitarist, Steve, to play with me for these shows. And playing with another person is neat too 'cause it allows me the freedom to kinda just sing without having to think about the violin as often. And so there's different ways. Different shows are different. But I think performing, for me, is probably my form of meditation. I have a pretty busy mind, and when you're performing, you are just there. And it's with you and the people who are there in the room, and it's a very alive experience. I really, really like it.

ALICE: And what does it feel like in terms of talking to the audience afterwards? Because I'm guessing you have a lot of fans from all communities, but in particular, your disabled fans. What's been the reaction and the way they've embraced you and their enthusiasm for you?

GAELYNN: Yeah! Oh my gosh! That has been maybe one of my favorite parts of this whole year is getting connected to the disability community through music. It didn't happen right away, but the longer I was on the road, the more people I would notice with disabilities coming. And I was like, "Yes! That's what I want!" But I'm not gonna, I just want people to come 'cause they wanna come, right? But I was happy to see that people were starting to come out. And then they would talk to me after, and I guess the message—which I feel myself—is they're just pumped because that is like a way to represent the disability community in a way that hasn't historically been done a ton. And they're like, "I finally get to see someone who looks like me onstage," and that is an awesome feeling.

Now, I feel the same way when I see— There's a performed named Kalyn, ironically.

ALICE: I love Wheelchair Sports Camp!

GAELYNN: Yeah, Wheelchair Sports Camp, right? I saw her, and I was just freaking out, so happy! I was so happy. 'Cause I really, really think we need more of that in the world.

ALICE: Yeah, and I think it's still a rarity, which is still a tragedy, I think.

GAELYNN: Yep. I don't think it should be a rarity. I mean I would rejoice in the day that it's not remarkable. But until that day, it's cool to know that— You know, I was a little nervous. You go out there, and you're like, I'm representing. I just wanna make sure that I'm doing it in a respectful way. But I'm also just me. Like that song, *I Wait*, I was kinda nervous to put it out. I really want that message to be in the culture, and I just wanna do it in a way that isn't just about me. I wanna make sure that it has the support or at least the understanding of other people. And we're not all gonna agree 'cause we're all so different. And I think we should have an open dialogue and shouldn't feel like you have to toe the line and always agree with everybody else. But I still, I want that message to be out there.

ALICE: Yeah. I saw you posted on Facebook, and I immediately shared it. So tell me about *I Wait* and where the idea came from and what the song is all about for the listeners who haven't heard it yet.

GAELYNN: Yeah. OK. So *I Wait* is, that song kinda came to me during the healthcare debates, and I was just so frustrated. Because I would read these articles—and I'm sure people in the community understand what I'm saying—I would read these articles, but they would leave out people with disabilities, one out of every two at least. It was really poorly reported on, and I was so frustrated. And so that song was borne out of that frustration. And then kind of on a broader sense, you can't—you can; you have the option—but I don't want to alienate everyone I know [chuckles] by being angry all the time at all the injustice. If you really, really think about it all the time, every day, you could really bring yourself down. And so I allow myself times to be angry and think about it and work towards change. But sometimes you also just have to live. And so there's a balancing act.

So *I Wait* is about the what do you do in the meantime when you're working for change, but you're not there yet, and change hasn't happened. And people don't really understand what that feels like around you. I don't know. How do you balance that whole feeling of anger and frustration with just living and working for change and not being bitter all the time? And that's sorta what that song, to me, is about.

ALICE: And try to enjoy our lives while we can.

GAELYNN: Exactly. There's this one line in there: "Everybody knows that you need a place to go, and living isn't easy if you incinerate your home." What I mean by that, I guess, is if I blasted out every single thing that I saw wasn't accessible, it would basically affect almost everybody in my community. And I do talk about it, but there is a point where you also have to live in your community. For me, I personally feel that you have to keep respect in the dialogue, and not everybody agrees with that.

[*I Wait*]

♪ Can you see me
Way in the back here
I've been waiting
I've been waiting in line.

It's been a long time
Can't get no service
Still I'm hoping
I am hoping for a sign

That one day things will change
And we can finally take our place
That history won't forget us
Or try to minimize our pain

And so I wait
And so I wait…. ♪

GoFundMe campaign for the new full-band album

ALICE: You recently launched a GoFundMe campaign for a new album. So tell me about how excited you are about your upcoming album and what your plans are for it.

GAELYNN: Yeah! I'm really excited for the upcoming album. I wrote a bunch of songs this year. *I Wait* was one of them, but there are bunch of other ones. And not all of them could be played solo. I use a looping pedal. So I don't know if I really explained that, but I push a button on a box that sits in my wheelchair, and it records what I play live. And then I let go of the button, and it plays it back again and again and again so I can layer up sounds. And a lot of songs I've learned to play by myself, but a few of them I can't. And so I decided I would at least work with there's a guitarist and a keyboardist that I really wanted to work with on this album. But they talked me into well, you should at least try a drum and a base 'cause it's gonna sound so cool. And I was like, "I don't know." But we did it one day. We did a recording session, and they are amazing. They're so fun.

So this album is a full band project, and unlike my previous albums, it's almost all singing. So more of my previous releases have been mostly instrumental, and this is pretty flipped. There's only two instrumental songs. Yeah, but it's a big undertaking 'cause it's a full band. You have to record a full band differently than if it's just me in a recording studio. So I needed to do a GoFundMe. So you can basically preorder the album now, and you'll get the album and then whatever else, like what level you donate at. But pretty much anyone who donates over $15 will get a copy of the album, at least a digital copy, when it's done.

ALICE: And studio time is expensive, right?

GAELYNN: Oh my gosh, yeah. We've been touring for over a year, and we've gotten to 41 states and six countries, and I feel like if I was ever gonna release a bigger project, this would be the time to do it in terms of momentum. And the song, for example, the disability rights song is on the album, and I think it's a relevant time to release music like that in our world. Yeah, so I'm doing it not legit, but I'm going all out. So it's a full-band studio, but then also, I hired a publicist, which is extremely expensive.

ALICE: Wow!

GAELYNN: But it's important. It's a pretty important piece.

ALICE: You have to do it to get it out there.

GAELYNN: Yeah.

ALICE: What's the point of creating music if the process of getting it—

GAELYNN: Yeah, and at this point, I think sometimes it's great to just release music and do it for fun or even just do it on a small scale and sell it to shows and stuff. But for this album, I just felt like it's such a big undertaking. It is a much more involved album than anything I've made that if I was gonna try to put anything out in the world, this is what I would want it to be.

And then the other thing we're doing that costs quite a bit is vinyl, but I've gotten a lot of requests for that. Again, if I was gonna invest it in any project, it would be this one. So that's why it's such a big undertaking. And paying a full band. I really wanna pay the artists.

ALICE: So the recording's all done?

GAELYNN: Yep, the recording is done. So now what we have left is mixing, and I'm doing that in March. And then it'll get mastered, and then that's when the PR will start in May, and it'll come out in the very beginning of September. So it seems like so far away, but in reality, it's gonna go really fast.

Wrap-up

ALICE: So Gaelynn, is there anything else you'd like to share?

GAELYNN: Yeah. I guess I could just say that, kind of the same with oh, I can't be an activist 'cause I'm not x, y, or z, it's really similar with music. First of all, music is much bigger than performance, and it's been around forever. And so you can do music for fun in your room, and nobody ever has to even hear it, and that's completely valid. And then the other thing is it can start at any point in life. I think sometimes people say they missed their window 'cause they didn't start when they were a kid. And so I just encourage people to do it. And then adapting too, like the way I play, it would take me a lot of work, and it would be harder for me the way I play to be like a super professional classical musician. But I found my own niche, and I think that even if you have to adapt your instrument, and even if it doesn't mean that it's gonna be precisely the way that everyone else sounds, right, it's still a valid artform. So if you have a disability, I really, really encourage you, if you wanna do music, to find a way. And with modern technology and samplers and synthesizers, there's a lot of ways, even with mobility issues. There's just a lot coming out.

ALICE: Well, and it's your sound.

GAELYNN: Yeah, exactly. It doesn't have to be like anything else.

ALICE: And I think that's what makes art great—

GAELYNN: Yeah!

ALICE: —is that you're doing it with the tools available to you, and also, it's your twist on what music should be.

GAELYNN: Exactly.

ALICE: Which is, in a lot of ways, what Hip Hop is, I think, too.

GAELYNN: Yeah, it's true, actually. That's a good point.

ALICE: But it's this idea about improvisation and about being in the moment.

GAELYNN: Yep. And it is, and it's really— I just encourage people to try it. If they have a desire to do it, they should try it.

ALICE: Take a risk.

GAELYNN: Yep. Take a risk. 'Cause you just have no idea. That's how it was for me, and I'm glad that I did. I don't know how life would be without it.

ALICE: Thank you so much for talking with me.

GAELYNN: Yeah, thank you, Alice. This was really fun.

ALICE: This was really great.

[hip-hop]

ALICE: This podcast is a production of the Disability Visibility Project, an online community dedicated to creating, sharing, and amplifying disability media and culture.

All episodes, including text transcripts, are available at DisabilityVisibilityProject.com/Podcast.

You can also find links about Gaelynn and how you can buy her music on our website.

The audio producer for this episode is Sarika D. Mehta. Introduction by Lateef McLeod. Theme music by Wheelchair Sports Camp.

Subscribe to our podcast on iTunes, Stitcher, or Google Play, and write a review if you have time. You can also support our podcast for $1 a month or more by going to our Patreon page at Patreon.com/DVP. That's p-a-t-r-e-o-n dot com, slash DVP.

Well, that's all for now. Thanks for listening, and see you on the Internets! Byyyeeeeee!

♪ How far will they go?
Oh yeah yeah
How far will they go?
Oh yeah yeah

How far will they go?
Oh yeah yeah
How far will they go? ♪